



# LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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**For immediate release**

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## **Aug. 6 Event to Celebrate Benefits of Breastfeeding**

The public is invited to observe World Breastfeeding Day Saturday, Aug. 6, at a fun-filled family event that will celebrate the many benefits of breastfeeding.

The event will be from 10 a.m. to noon in Women's Park, at the corner of Neill and Fuller avenues. It's sponsored by the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) nutrition program of the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department and the Helena Breastfeeding Coalition.

The event will include activities for the entire family, including music, food, balloon animals, and face painting. Nursing mothers also will be invited to participate in "The Big Latch," an effort to set a world record for the number of women nursing their babies at exactly the same time all around the world. The aim of The Big Latch is to raise awareness of breastfeeding and make it a normal part of day-to-day life in the community. The Big Latch will take place at 10:30 a.m.

WIC has long encouraged breastfeeding because it has been linked to numerous health benefits for babies and mothers.

Infants who are breastfed have fewer ear and respiratory infections and gastrointestinal illnesses, according to the federal Office on Women's Health. Breastfeeding also has been shown to lower the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Children who were breastfed may have a lower risk for developing asthma, obesity, and diabetes.

In mothers, breastfeeding has been linked to a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and postpartum depression.

"Breast milk has just the right amount of fat, sugar, water, and protein to help a baby grow," said Maggie Petaja, WIC director at the health department. "It's also easier for babies to digest than formula. And the cells, hormones, and antibodies in breast milk help protect babies from illness."

Society also benefits when women choose to breastfeed, Petaja said. Recent research shows that if 90 percent of U.S. families breastfed exclusively for six months, almost 1,000 infant deaths could be prevented each year and close to \$13 billion in medical costs could be saved. Breastfed infants typically need fewer doctor visits, prescriptions, and hospitalizations, she noted.

Breastfeeding also benefits the environment, since it doesn't produce trash in the form of formula cans and bottle supplies.

About 85 percent of mothers in Lewis and Clark County are breastfeeding at the time they're discharged from the hospital after giving birth, according to statistics compiled by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

"Not every woman and child will be able to breastfeed," Petaja said. "But we want to provide encouragement and practical assistance to those who can and choose to."

WIC recommends that women breastfeed their infants for a minimum of 3-6 months.

WIC is a member of the Helena Breastfeeding Coalition, which also includes the St. Peter's Hospital Maternal and Child Health Unit, and the La Leche League, as well as local businesses that support breastfeeding. More information is available from WIC, 457-8912, and the coalition website, <http://helenabreastfeedingcoalition.webs.com/>

*The Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis & Clark County residents.*

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